



HEARD ACROSS MONTANA

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Statewide Communication Interoperability Plan Approved

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On Friday, April 4, Montana received notification that its Statewide Communication Interoperability Plan (SCIP) was formally approved by the Office of Emergency Communications (OEC). The plan was submitted on December 3, 2007.

A joint peer review process was used to evaluate and provide input according to the Weighted Evaluation Criteria and the PSIC Investment Justifications. More than 100 public sector employees—including Federal, State, local, and tribal representation—who had expertise and/or experience with emergency operations, interoperable communications, public safety, or grants management, participated in the process. OEC used peer input to make final approval decisions. Scott Bradford and Wing Spooner, PSSB staff members, and Jack Spillman, Lewis and Clark County Radio System Administrator, served as peer reviewers and evaluated SCIPs from other states.

Montana's plan was complimented for being straightforward and easy to follow. Reviewers said that the SCIP shows a definite resolve to address the communications interoperability gap in Montana. Montana was praised for its support and desire to see the project succeed. "It provides thoughtful insight in its plan and is inclusive of varying agencies across the state."

In addition, Montana's use of regional consortia was cited as an effective method for involving all geographic regions of the state on an ongoing basis, ensuring that regional needs are included in the statewide planning process. In fact, reviewers said that the SCIP provided "excellent, detailed information on the governance structure" and it was a "very impressive organization." Use of regional consortia was recommended to be included as a best practice for other states.

Furthermore, reviewers commented that "The inclusion of railroad assets into the statewide interoperability solution is a concept that should be considered by other states. Montana's interest in using its own assets to meet some unique needs of a neighboring state (Idaho) is laudable and is recommended as a best practice."

Recommendations to the SCIP also were made, including, providing greater detail on timelines and

implementation rollout, developing a process to update the SCIP in future years, and including more of the detailed and valuable data from Montana's interoperability websites directly in the SCIP.

OEC recognizes this approval milestone as critical in its partnership with states and localities to advance interoperability across the nation, and will offer additional assistance with SCIP implementation.

PSIC Investment Justifications Approved

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Montana received notification on Thursday, April 10, that its three Investment Justifications (IJs) for the Public Safety Interoperability Communications (PSIC) grant have been approved, and no further action is required on the submittal. This means that about \$6.4 million will be released for the approved PSIC Investments.

The first and second IJs were for two fixed infrastructure (microwave backbone) projects. IJ # 1 proposed a digital microwave communication ring to address the needs for digital connectivity between the State capitol (and radio/data control site) in Helena and Billings, Montana's largest urban area. The programmatic and peer review panels agreed that this infrastructure improvement is an essential step toward future interoperability and that other projects will be dependent upon its completion. Reviewers believed that the solution was well defined and will improve public safety interoperability by inter-connecting disparate systems across the State.

IJ # 2 addressed interoperability connectivity between Montana and Idaho by creating 12 microwave loops and upgrading or building 8 communications sites. Reviewers agreed that this infrastructure improvement was also an essential step toward future interoperability and that this investment would greatly improve public safety interoperability. The reviewers noted that the funds were clearly aligned to carry out the goals developed during the SCIP strategic planning process. They also believed that this project represented a cost-effective implementation of advanced technology.

It was suggested that additional detail about project management could have strengthened both IJs with more information about the management team's roles, responsibilities and structure. Peer reviewers also noted that more information about



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training and exercises should be a consideration for future efforts related to IJ sustainability.

IJ # 3 related to the Strategic Technology Reserve (STR), which will regionally deploy spare parts, emergency repair kits, emergency generators, and mobile radios to be used if critical communications infrastructure is damaged or destroyed. Reviewers believed that the STR Investment was a good use of funds because it provides a backup capability that can be deployed throughout the state, depending on mission criticality. Reviewers agreed that throughout the implementation of this IJ, Montana should conduct additional contingency planning and incorporate training and exercises as a good management practice. Overall, reviewers indicated that the IJ met STR requirements to be repositioned, deployable, and able to re-establish communications.

Reviewers agreed that all three investments were consistent with the interoperability goals set forth in the SCIP and that the projects would ultimately improve statewide interoperability.

Operation Stonegarden Grant Update

By E. Wing Spooner espooner@mt.gov

Public Safety Services Bureau (PSSB) is pleased to report that all 11 counties on the border with Canada collaborated effectively with the Spokane and Havre Border Patrol Sectors to submit an Operation Stonegarden grant. The purpose of this Dept. of Homeland Security (DHS) grant is to enhance law enforcement preparedness and operational readiness along the land borders of the United States.

PSSB, in support of Sheriff Wayne Dusterhoff and the Northern Tier, contracted with retired state employee and grant writer, Jim Oppedahl, an at-large member of the Montana Board of Crime Control, to compile and submit the grant. Jim has been an administrator in three different divisions of Montana's Department of Justice and was the State Court Administrator for the Montana Supreme Court when he retired in April 2006. Jim reported that "the application represents law enforcement's best effort to put together proposals for collaboration, force multipliers and partnerships to protect the northern border."

He also stated that Border Patrol employees LeAlan Pinkerton, Spokane Sector Chief, and Craig Jeffrey, Havre Sector Assistant Chief, did a great job of crafting the draft Operations Orders for each

county. The grant requested about \$2.33 million, of which 48% was for overtime and fringe benefits, 2% for vehicle and equipment maintenance, 38% for new or replacement equipment, 4% for fuel and 8% for mileage reimbursement. About \$600,000 of the total grant request was to support interoperable communications equipment to enhance communications along the border.

Northern Tier Project Director Wayne Dusterhoff, Glacier County Sheriff, and Havre Undersheriff Don Brostrom were instrumental in bringing law enforcement and tribal representatives to an organizational meeting in Havre on March 19. The meeting helped to clarify grant requirements, identify regional needs, and ascertain interoperable communications needs that met county and Border Patrol operational requirements.

This one-time, \$60 million appropriation allows local units of government at the county level to apply through the Montana State Administration Agency (SAA), Disaster and Emergency Services (DES). DHS expects to make 15 awards. The grant award announcement is expected by July 31, 2008, and it is hoped that the Montana's strong, collaborative application will warrant funding.

Upcoming Meetings

April 15-16

Western Border Interoperability Working Group Mtg.
Lethbridge, Alberta

April 17

I-15/90 Corridor Consortium
Butte • 10:00 am
Chamber of Commerce Conf. Rm.; 1000 George St.

April 21-24

Governor's Emergency Preparedness Conference
Billings • Holiday Inn Grand, 5500 Midland Road
Register at: <http://eu.montana.edu/preparedness/>

April 24

Interoperability Montana (IM) Technical Committee
Billings • 8:00 am - noon
Holiday Inn Grand, 5500 Midland Road

April 24-25

Interoperability Montana (IM) Retreat
Billings • Holiday Inn Grand, 5500 Midland Road
Register at: <http://eu.montana.edu/preparedness/>

April 28

IM Finance Sub-Committee Work Session
Helena • 9:00 to noon
Northrop Grumman, 2401 Colonial Drive

April 30

Eastern Tier (ETIC) • Glendive • 10:00 am
Law Enforcement Center; 440 Colorado Blvd.

May 1

NTIP Conference Call • Telephone • 9:00 am